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INFO RUEHTH/AMEMBASSY ATHENS 9392
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RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 3486
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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 7, 2009

In Today's Papers

Turkey's Criticism of Israeli Operations in Gaza Complicates
Bilateral Relations

During yesterday's AKP party meeting, Prime Minister Erdogan warned the Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barack and Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni against trying to use the Gaza operations to shore up points in Israel's upcoming February elections. "Forget about your upcoming elections, because history will judge you for the black stain that is being left on humanity," Erdogan said. Islamist-oriented Zaman notes Erdogan said, "As the grandson of Ottomans who accepted Jews fleeing persecution in the past, Turkey has always supported the oppressed." He also called on the world, "to extend support to Gaza."

Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak reports Prime Minister Erdogan said during an AKP meeting that he "refuses to talk to Israeli Prime Minister Olmert on the telephone until the bloodshed in Gaza ends." Also during this meeting, Yeni Safak reports Erdogan "criticized Arab leaders who have stopped short of pushing for an end to the crisis in Gaza."

Mainstream Hurriyet reports Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni phoned Turkish Foreign Minister Ali Babacan and called Erdogan's harsh public criticism of Israel, "unacceptable." Hurriyet reports Livni said, "We understand the sensitivities in Turkey, but Israel is fighting against terrorism, just like Turkey." In response, Babacan told Livni, "the bloodshed in Gaza is drawing worldwide attention," and "it is irresponsible to kill innocent civilians," so "our government cannot remain indifferent to public reactions." Babacan also stressed that Turkey has "called on Hamas to end their attacks." In a related story, Islamist-oriented Zaman reports Defense Minister Vecdi Gonul said, "The Turkish government will not annul any defense deals with Israel," because "defense deals made with Israel serve Turkey's interests."

Israel Bombs UN School in Gaza
Turkish media are transfixed on the story of a UN-sponsored school in Gaza that was bombed by the Israelis. Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet carries the headline, "A Massacre at a School Flying the

UN Flag." Liberal Radikal reports, "UN Schools Become the Graveyard of Women and Children." Mainstream Vatan reports, "After Striking Mosques, Hospitals, and Ambulances, Israel's Latest Targets Are UN Schools." Mainstream Hurriyet carries the headline, "43 Are Killed When a UN School, Used as a Civilian Shelter, is Bombed." Islamist-oriented Zaman reports, "Palestinians Are Attacked as They Seek Shelter from the UN." Mainstream Sabah carries the headline, "Even a UN School Was Hit." Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak reports the UN school, "Was the Only Place They Could Find Shelter," and was struck as Palestinians "fled there in search of water and shelter."

Columnists note Turkey is taking controversial steps in order to seek a peace deal. Mehmet Tezkan wrote in mainstream Vatan, "Defending Palestinians does not mean acting like a sponsor of Hamas. Turkish PM Erdogan is making a big mistake by taking sides with Hamas considering the fact that even some Arab nations treat Hamas as an organization that undermines peace." Ali Bayramoglu wrote in Islamist oriented Yeni Safak: "Unless Arabs are united, the Arab-Israel conflict will continue to shake the balances in the Middle East. Alienating Hamas because of its Islamist roots is a big mistake. The Western world and Arabs are digging their own ditches." Erdal Safak wrote in mainstream Sabah, "PM Erdogan's foreign policy adviser (Ahmet Davutoglu) is in Damascus for the third time in a very short period. Turkey's efforts involving Hamas are the right approach because Hamas will end up being a negotiation partner eventually since the Gaza operation by Israel will pave the way for Hamas's legitimization." Fikret Bila wrote in mainstream Milliyet, "As confirmed by Government Spokesman, State Minister Cicek, Turkey wants to be very active in diplomatic efforts. Moreover Ankara is ready to join the International Monitoring Group

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to be stationed on the Egypt-Gaza border." Murat Yetkin wrote in liberal-intellectual Radikal, "The Turkish government wants to use every diplomatic effort until the bitter end. Diplomatic contacts cover not only the region, but also the U.S. Turkish Foreign Minister Babacan has just left for New York. Despite the angry remarks from the AKP and others, the AKP government did not pass a parliamentary resolution to denounce Israel at this point."

Protestors Block Basketball Game between Turkey and Israel
Milliyet, Cumhuriyet, Radikal: A Euro Cup basketball game between Turk Telekom and Israel's Bnei Hasharon was cancelled due to intense audience protests against Israel's operations in Gaza. Mainstream Milliyet reports that protestors sprayed tear gas at police and shattered the entrance doors of the sports saloon. Because the audience's protest would not calm down, the Israeli team refused to play the game.

Natural Gas Flow to Turkey Completely Cut Off from Western Line of Russia
Hurriyet, Zaman, Sabah, Cumhuriyet, Vatan and others: Mainstream Hurriyet reports that Energy Minister Hilmi Guler said Russia has completely halted the flow of natural gas from the western line of Russia to Turkey, but the Ministry has taken the necessary measures on the matter and "will not make people suffer." Mainstream Vatan quotes Minister Guler as saying "Turkey has natural gas reserves for 57 days." Meanwhile, leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet reports that Turkey was "caught unprepared for natural gas shortage."

Trial Begins for Taraf Editor
Leftist Taraf reports that the Istanbul Besiktas District Prosecutor filed a case against the Taraf newspaper for "disclosing classified information related to the publication of the satellite images of the Aktutun attack," in which 17 soldiers were killed. If found guilty, Taraf Editor Adnan Demir could be sentenced to three to five years in prison. The first phase of the trial is expected to begin soon in Istanbul, the report adds.

Diyarbakir Mayor Baydemir Criticizes PM's Peace Efforts
Milliyet reports that at a local party meeting, Diyarbakir Mayor Osman Baydemir said "PM Erdogan is not sincere in his calls for peace in the Middle East. While he demands a truce in Palestine, he also orders military strikes against Qandil." Regarding TRT's Kurdish broadcasting Baydemir said "Our 20-year struggle for the recognition of the Kurdish language, culture and identity had

produced results. Someday, the name of our land (i.e. 'Kurdistan') also will be recognized."

Investigation Continues into 22 Containers Transported from Iran
Mainstream Sabah reports that a Custom's Official from Mersin port said that investigators did not find any radioactive materials in the 22 containers seized in Mersin last month. However, since there are materials in them that may be used for the production of explosives, military experts have been called in to inspect the containers. After the military inspection is completed, the authorities will decide whether to allow the containers to proceed to Venezuela.

TV News:
CNN Turk

Domestic News

- Prime Ministry spokesman Akif Beki resigns from his post.
- 120 people, including municipality officials, are detained in Izmir during an investigation into a bribery scandal involving construction and real estate deals.
- TRT television prepares special programs to mark the tenth day of

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Alevis' Muharrem fasting.

- Iran offers to increase natural gas supplies to Turkey after the Russian supplies were cut.

International News

- Synagogues and other Jewish sites in Europe are targeted after Israel's Gaza offensive.
- US Secretary of State Rice goes to the UN to help with international efforts to arrange a ceasefire in Gaza.

JEFFREY